

Comments from Pre-Proposal Meeting
Abingdon, Virginia
October 3, 2002

MR. GLYNN LOOPE: Thank you. My name is Glynn Loope and I represent Smart Solutions, a coalition of trucking and manufacturing and other business, local government, related interests up and down the I-81 corridor. Since the time restraint was lifted, I will share one quick antidote. In 1987, I was just up the street at the Martha Washington Inn at a candidate's forum for all of the candidates for the General Assembly in Southwest Virginia and they were all on a podium lined up. There must have been ten of them lined up on a podium just like this. One after another stood up and said, "This is my vision for Southwest Virginia." "This is my vision for this issue." "This is my vision for how we're going to go forward into the 21st Century." And now we're in the 21st Century. Well, at that very moment, Senator Madison Mayre stood up. In his typical homespun fashion said, "Hell, if any of us on this platform had any vision whatsoever, a decade ago we would have six-laned 81 from Bristol to Washington." All right. That would have put us at 77. I would like to thank the Virginia Department of Transportation for holding this series of sessions held on Tuesday, Wednesday, and tonight to address this very daunting task that has been put forth to not only this Department but each of the localities along the I-81 corridor, the regions that encompass those localities, and the Commonwealth as a whole. I don't envy your task. And especially in these lean budget times, I have to think about the press release that the Governor issued last week where he called for creativity -- which is another subject that politicians aren't exactly noted for -- in the development of any solution to the transportation needs of the Commonwealth and I-81 specifically. To me, the implication that we should use creativity in the development of the proposals that will be coming to your desks by January the 17th, to me, states that tolls, to finance the improvements that are before us, may not nor should be the only thing considered to finance this critical part of our economic infrastructure. If the Smart Solutions Coalition has highlighted any subject over the course of the last several months, it's that it is not only trucking interests that have a vested interest in the use of tolls on the 81 corridor, in fact, we have highlighted that our manufacturing sector has a critical role in this debate. Everything from the family owned sawmill to the Goliath such as Meade Wesvaca that you heard from last night, or, farther up the I-81 corridor, Coors Brewing Company in Harrisonburg, or, a little farther up, National Fruit in Winchester. In fact, in the course of my economic development

interests, I simply want to caution the department that in the acceptance of any proposals, that we not do anything that jeopardizes this region's ability to compete economically. Some of us that are more associated with economic development than transportation fear ads that could appear in national publications from the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, or West Virginia that state, "Come to us. You don't have to pay to get in," or, "Welcome to Virginia. We're open for business. Toll booth two miles ahead." To us, the business of economic development on the I-81 corridor is tough enough without having to compete against a ten, twenty, thirty, or plus percent toll per mile just to do business in this corridor. Lastly, for the sake of time, I want to state this which is the main purpose for coming to this podium. The trucking interests of this Commonwealth and this country want to be a part of the solution, not pegged as being a part or the sole part of the problem. We want to partner with any consulting, engineering, or construction entity that wants to work with us in devising a proposal that provides the least amount of harm to not only the industry but to the Commonwealth in this corridor as a whole. Thank you.

MR. AL MOYER: I'd love to tell you I have a Madison Mayre story, but I don't. But everybody, I think, has a couple, but Glynn's was a good one. Good evening. I'm Al Moyer from Roanoke, Virginia. I am a small business owner and I am a member of the Star Solutions Communications Team. First, let me offer my personal support for the Virginia Department of Transportation's efforts to solve the safety and the congestion problems along the Interstate 81 corridor. Secondly and more specifically, let me offer some words on behalf of Star Solutions, an innovative and a constructive team that's involved -- it's a consortium of Virginia and international engineering and consulting firms that are committed to a new vision for improvements on Interstate 81. This past January, the Star team submitted a proposal under the purview of the state Public and Private Transportation Act. This proposal was returned by the VDOT staff as the department refined and clarified its review criteria for PPTA proposals. VDOT has now reopened the PPTA process and the Star Team is in the midst of reviewing the new department guidelines. Star will resubmit its proposal by the January 17th, 2003, deadline, taking into consideration all of the VDOT requirements. In fact, Star's existing proposal anticipated and incorporated most of the new VDOT evaluation criteria. Key elements of the Star Proposal include: four lanes in each direction; separation of cars and trucks; all of I-81, all 325 miles, completed in fifteen years; a twenty year warranty on the roadbed; innovative funding and financial leveraging options including: private, Federal and State dollars, and the use of truck

user fees as authorized by the 2002 General Assembly. In summary, the Star Proposal addresses critical safety and congestion concerns along Interstate 81 corridor that have been repeatedly voiced by the public. Specifically, a survey taken last November indicated the following: 85 percent of the people along the corridor support expanding the roadway to four lanes in each direction; 75 percent of the people support tolls on trucks if trucks and cars are separated. This public sentiment coupled with serious concerns about accident rates on Interstate 81 -- 341 injuries and nine deaths during a recent 18-month period -- make this a priority road project impacting us all as citizens, as business people, and as travelers. Star Solutions is pleased to offer innovative and creative potential solutions for Interstate 81. We look forward to continuing to work with the VDOT staff in the weeks and months ahead as we continue through the PPTA review process. Thank you for your time and for this forum to present our thoughts.

MR. CHAD BAKER: The question I've got for you is, I'm a smaller contractor and the question I've got -- you know, when you start taking off -- you take a thirty-mile section of road, that's bigger than I can handle. And if you have a huge -- if you let these sections go in huge sections, you know, that takes a smaller contractor out of the equation and, you know, it gets away from the fair enterprise market system our country's been founded on.

MR. DAN MARSTON: Well, if I could comment right now.

MR. CHAD BAKER: Yes, sir. Go right ahead. That's my point.

MR. DAN MARSTON: It's our desire and our hope that if we decide to go forward with any proposal -- I don't know how many will be submitted; it may be one, may be ten, but if we choose one and decide it's an adequate proposal, it would be available for all types of contractors; minority contractors, small contractors, large contractors, and the like. This is not an opportunity to try to exclude the local business or any other business. And, certainly, it would have Federal -- it's a Federal road. So, there would certainly be consideration for minorities and small businesses and the like.

MR. CHAD BAKER: Is our competitive bidding system right now not working?

MR. DAN MARSTON: No. Well, I guess if a particular bidding system could propose, we could accept it. But they could also propose to do it themselves or with a number of contractors and they would identify subs or -- if not immediately, but at some later date.

MR. CHAD BAKER: Okay. Thank you, sir.

MR. FRED KIIFFNER: If you look on page four of the RFP, the top item, number 16, one of the things that we're looking for is the appropriate use of competitive processes during all phases (Preliminary Engineering, Right of

Way and Construction) of the development of the Interstate 81 corridor in order to assure open access to economic opportunities. So, we did want to consider that and that's why we have that in there.

MR. AL MOYER: Just a couple of questions, if I may. And I know this question has come up before, but I think every audience needs to hear it. Will VDOT accept proposals that incorporate car tolls on any I-81 project?

MR. DAN MARSTON: I would think we'll accept anything. I mean, we'll accept any proposal.

MR. MAL KERLEY: Well, we're going to accept any proposal. Whether we enter into a comprehensive agreement and accept it from the viewpoint of taking it past any review stage, we'll have to see what that proposal is. And there may be some State and Federal laws that might have to be addressed as to whether there's any tolls on cars.

MR. DAN MARSTON: We are asking for innovative and creative solutions not only on the type of road -- or the type -- multi-modal, rail, also involved, but also financial.

MR. AL MOYER: The other question I have has to do with economic development, which, I think, everybody in each of the regions up and down the corridor has expressed some interest in as does Star Solutions. In 1988, VDOT hearings in this particular area and the Star teams' recent meetings with some of the local government officials, there has been some concern or interest, rather, expressed in increasing access to 81. Specifically, I think at mile post 11 for the Abingdon and Washington County area and further down the road at Smyth County. My question is, does VDOT have any opinions about increased access on this new proposed roadbed?

MR. DAN MARSTON: Several years ago -- several years ago -- you can correct me, Fred, or whatever -- several years ago we had some widening studies. There was identified locations, perhaps -- they were never approved, never adopted -- perhaps, would fit additional interchanges. We never got to where we discussed it or really a final design or a final proposal and certainly FHWA which have to be involved, Federal Highway Administration, has not said, yes, it would be a good idea. But there were several studies done I guess it was five or six years ago. How long ago, Fred?

MR. FRED KIIFFNER: It's been about five years ago. And back on access approval, any access approval to the Interstate, that is -- even modifying an existing one -- has to go before the Federal Highway Administration for their concurrence and their approval. We make recommendations to them and provide them with all the information that's required and it's a lengthy process. A lot of the engineers in here are aware of that. And they take into

consideration the relieving traffic from other interchanges and so forth and they have the final say as to additional approval.

MR. AL MOYER: And one last question. I know the request for proposals talks in terms of multi-modal and there are some comments about rail. My understanding is that there are some prior VDOT studies that are on the record about rail. And, if my memory is correct, they indicated that the costs exceeded benefits by about a factor of three to one. Are we expecting some significant change in that prior study? Has new information come to light about the efficiency and effectiveness of rail?

MR. DAN MARSTON: All the studies will be available. What the solution is -- and we're not ruling anything out. We're not ruling anything in. But we're asking for a comprehensive multi-modal review. And that doesn't mean that we support rail or we oppose rail or whatever. At this time, we don't want it to be automatically excluded.

I-81 RFP Meeting
Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center
Abingdon, Virginia
October 3, 2002
6 p.m.

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